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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000949

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SCUL](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: MFA LAUNCHES PUBLIC RELATIONS BLITZ ON RCTV

REF: A. CARACAS 00907

[1](#)B. MADRID 00741

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES
FOR REASON 1.4 (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Minister of Popular Power for Foreign Affairs Nicolas Maduro convoked the diplomatic corps May 8 to outline the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's (BRV's) justifications for revoking the broadcasting license of independent media outlet Radio Caracas Television (RCTV) on May 28. The event is part of a larger, international initiative by the BRV to counter RCTV owner Marcel Granier's lobbying efforts abroad. Recent BRV efforts to defend its anti-RCTV decision indicate BRV officials are atypically concerned about international reaction to RCTV's shutdown. New BRV arguments assert that the government is merely "democratizing" the airwaves and steer clear of President Chavez' original contentions that the station is "counter-revolutionary." END SUMMARY.

BRV's Side of the Story

[1](#)2. (SBU) Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro announced May 7 a new BRV public relations strategy to "clarify" international misconceptions regarding the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's (BRV's) decision to not renew Radio Caracas Television's (RCTV's) broadcasting license. Maduro said the initiative will allow the BRV to counter the "lies" being presented by RCTV owner Marcel Granier abroad, as well as explain the "new" model for public service television being created in Venezuela. Maduro said BRV ambassadors, journalists, and National Assembly (NA) members were called to "defend" the BRV's position on RCTV as part of the initiative. He reported that several NA members had already traveled to Europe to discuss RCTV and would soon do the same in Latin America (ref A). He also noted that BRV diplomatic missions were recently provided with the necessary outreach tools (talking points, power-point presentations) to hold discussions with interested parties abroad.

[1](#)3. (C) During the announcement, Maduro took the opportunity to criticize Granier's efforts to raise international support for RCTV (ref A, B). Maduro referred to Granier as a "mafioso" intent on "damaging the BRV's international public image." (Note: Granier met with European Union Parliamentarians in Strasbourg on April 24 and held several meetings and press interviews in Spain April 17 to discuss

freedom of expression in Venezuela and RCTV's case. End Note.)

¶4. (C) The British DCM also reported Maduro had recalled a number of European-based BRV ambassadors on short notice to attend a May 4 dinner with local European Embassy representatives and MFA officials. The poorly organized event appears to part of the BRV's new RCTV offensive.

Democratizing the Media

¶5. (SBU) Maduro personally implemented his new strategy, convoking the diplomatic corps for a May 8 presentation on the BRV's ongoing efforts to "democratize the media." The Charge attended the event and noted strong participation from the diplomatic community. Maduro was supposed to be accompanied by Minister of Popular Power for Telecommunications Jesse Chacon and Communications Minister William Lara, but Lara did not attend the presentation. Maduro began with a lengthy review of Venezuelan contemporary history from the 1989 Caracas riots onwards, emphasizing the democratic nature of the Chavez regime and the evils of capitalism and free enterprise.

¶6. (SBU) Minister Chacon then gave a power-point presentation which attempted to justify the shut-down of RCTV. His principle points included:

-- The BRV is trying to "democratize the media," and RCTV's license expiration provides an opportunity to do so. The "new" model is to be called Public Service TV, and will be characterized by a breaking of the connection between the medium and the message, plurality, popular participation, and will focus on citizens, not consumers.

-- Freedom of expression is not being violated by RCTV's

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shutdown because a large number of private television and radio stations are still operating in Venezuela. He also asserted several times that corporations do not have a right to freedom of expression, only individuals.

-- The BRV's refusal to renew RCTV's broadcasting license is legal, and an automatic license renewal would be unconstitutional because that would deny other potential license applicants the opportunity to bid for it. (Note: The BRV has not announced a bidding process for the ex-RCTV license. Instead, the BRV is simply assuming control over the frequency. End Note.)

-- Private media in Venezuela amounts to a monopoly which must be broken up in the interests of citizens. Seventy-one percent of all television ad revenues go to Venevision and RCTV, which have acted as an cartel to set ad prices. PROCOMPETENCIA, a BRV agency, sanctioned the two outlets for their anti-competitive practices in 2005, fining RCTV approximately USD 9.7 million.

-- RCTV has been repeatedly closed by previous Venezuelan governments for a variety of offenses dating back to 1976. (Note: Most of the closures cited were for a day or two. End Note.)

-- Several countries have revoked television licenses, including Latin American countries and the United States.

Comment

¶7. (C) Surprisingly, the BRV appears concerned about international reaction to the inevitable RCTV shutdown. Typically, the BRV discards international criticism with an

insult, but Maduro and Chacon's presentation to the resident diplomatic corps and the deployment of NA members to Europe indicate that the BRV feels pressured to justify its actions.

The BRV's arguments are all over the map, and what they tried to establish as the fundamental reason -- the need to "democratize communications" -- doesn't hold water. They could presumably implement that fuzzy concept without shutting down RCTV, either by using one of the six channels the BRV now controls or a UHF frequency. Interestingly, Chavez' original rationale for the shutdown, that RCTV was "counter-revolutionary" during the events of April 2002 and continues to favor the "oligarchic" opposition, was never mentioned.

WHITAKER